

HERO TEAMS WITH AUSSIE DIRECTOR FOR BIG HIT

Highflier carves himself new role

The wheat fields of Pennsylvania are a far cry from Star Wars galaxies and the adventures of Indiana Jones.

In Harrison Ford's latest movie, *Witness*, directed by Australian Peter Weir, Ford doesn't get to crack an Indiana Jones bullwhip, nor does he get to save a princess as he did as Hans Solo.

This time, Ford plays a tough Philadelphia detective, who while investigating a brutal murder, gets caught up in the gentle, passive, other world of the Amish, an 18th Century religious cult.

And while Ford, 42, has no complaints about Hans Solo or Indiana Jones, the break-away role as John Book in *Witness* is something that suits him just fine.

Witness has won Ford plaudits and proved beyond doubt that he is not only hot box office and a hero to millions across the world, but he is an actor who can bring across a charisma, power and impact that is reminiscent of all Hollywood's greats — the Gary Coopers, John Waynes, Cary Grants and Paul Newmans.

Not only has Ford received rave reviews for his performance as John Book in *Witness*, but the film itself is a smash, garnering more than \$4.5 million in its first weekend on release across the US.

The Star Wars epics and the two Indiana Jones sagas

From JENNY CULLEN
in Los Angeles

brought Ford superstardom and millions of dollars.

But they also brought something Ford has fought for since he first became an actor — artistic freedom.

Ford, who once noted "unlike some actors I cannot be good in a bad picture" chose to do *Witness* after turning down script after script and all scripts in the action-adventure genre.

After Indiana Jones And The Temple Of Doom, Ford wanted a movie that was a different role, one with depth and something that would stretch him as an actor.

He had fizzled in such post Star Wars efforts as *Force 10 From Navarone*, *Hanover Street* and *The Frisco Kid*. *Blade Runner*, the sci-fi epic of 1982, was not a success.

"I choose a part because I hope the film itself will be a communication. I'm only comfortable in that context," says the normally reticent Ford.

"Film is after all, an effort in communication. You have to have something you want to say and you want to say it enough to endure the process of making a film. If you've got nothing to say, you shouldn't be there."

Earl W. Wallace and William Kelley's screenplay for *Witness* reached Ford while he was filming *Indiana Jones And The Temple Of Doom*.



On the set of *Witness*, ALEXANDER GODUNOV, HARRISON FORD, KELLY MCGILLIS and Australian director PETER WEIR.

"It was the kind of film I thought was about 90 per cent there, which is a higher grade than I give most scripts when I first get them," he said.

"But I felt if we didn't have a really good director it wouldn't gain anything and would most likely lose something in the translation."

Ford let it be known he was interested in *Witness* only if the movie could attract a top director.

Ford made a list of directors he wanted to work with. Australia's Peter Weir of *The Year Of Living Dangerously*, *Picnic At Hanging Rock* and *The Last Wave* was on the list.

Weir was tied up with another project, his first American movie, but as happens in Hollywood it fell through and he was offered *Witness*.

Ford was delighted. He had a fine director, a strong script and he then signed on the dotted line.

While Ford will not reveal the other directors he listed, he does say Weir was one of the few directors who could not only cope, but improve and expand, on the clash of incongruous cultures — the

contemporary tough cop's world of Philadelphia, and the gentle, slow paced, 18th Century life of the Amish.

Weir and Ford not only worked well together, garnering rave reviews from all critics in the US for both director — "Weir's extraordinary artistry" — and actor, but became good friends.

When Ford flew to Australia for post editing of *Witness* last November he stayed with Weir and it was then, gossip has it, they began discussions for a new movie together.

On that visit to Australia, Ford was not giving interviews. But he promises he will return in April or May to promote *Witness*, and yes, while he is uncomfortable with interviews, he will talk.

Of all Hollywood's hottest superstars, Ford is probably the most introverted, quiet and reticent when talking about himself.

Off-screen there is no brash egotistical quirky humored Hans Solo or devil-may-care adventurer Indiana Jones.

Instead, there is a reserved man, who thinks before he answers questions and is evasive about anything smacking of his private life.

Ask him what car he drives and he tells you the color. Not

the make. Not the model. Just nothing.

For Ford, success came late rather than early. The graduate of Chicago University in 1966, Ford was cast in a bomb movie, *Dead Heat On A Merry Go Round*, and his performance as a bellhop caused one studio executive who thought Ford looked too much like a real bellhop to quip "you ain't got it, kid."

What followed were roles in films like *Getting Straight* and *Luv* and they did little to prove that Ford had "it".

After 18 months Ford left Columbia and joined Universal where he popped up in a string of TV series — *Gunsmoke*, *Ironside*, *The FBI* and *The Virginian*.

And then Ford tossed it in. "I finally decided to become a carpenter, as an alternative to taking roles I didn't like," he said.

Ford left his woodworking only occasionally, to play the drag racer in *American Graffiti*, the hatchet man in *The Conversation* and, in fact, was redoing Sally Kellerman's kitchen when he got called in for *Star Wars*.

"I suppose there is a disadvantage to being identified (as

a star) too early on," he says.

"I'm pleased I was allowed to develop slowly. I was in the business for 12 years before I did *Star Wars* and I think that's appropriate. I am the kind of person who learns from experience. And I had a lot to learn."

Ford accepts his success these days as philosophically as he deals with flops like *Force 10 From Navarone*.

He said: "Failures are inevitable. It's not so easy to pick and choose. What's difficult is to find something that arouses both your enthusiasm and imagination."

With *Witness* he picked a winner. "I think it's the most complicated role I've played in quite a while. And it's one with adult appeal," he says.

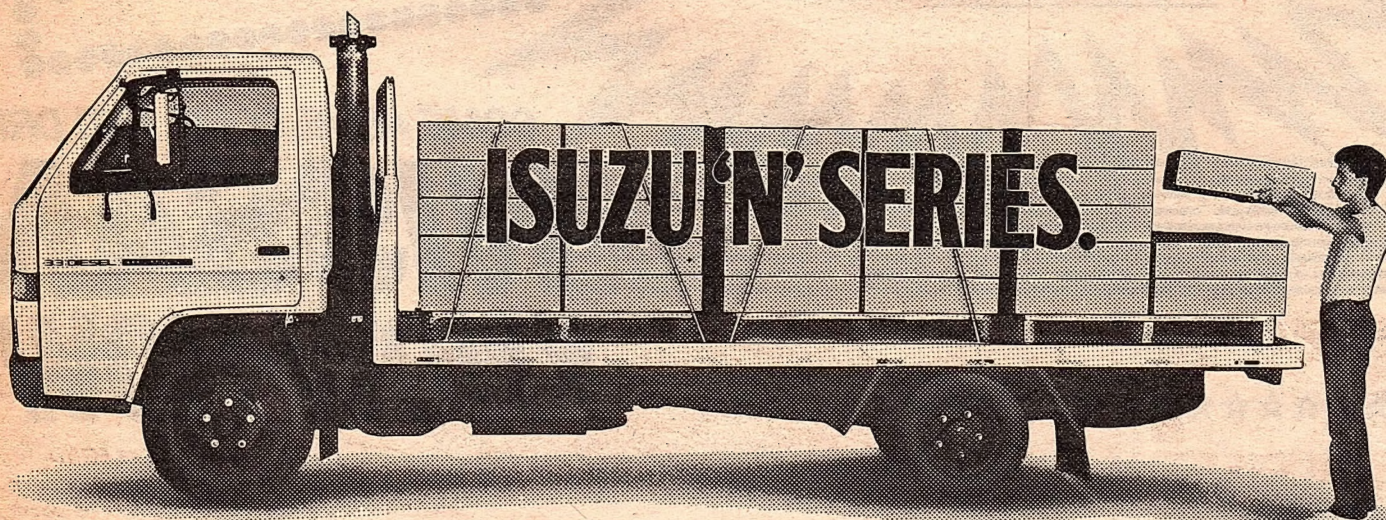
But Ford, while delighted with the three dimensional character of John Book, is not about to knock Hans Solo or Indiana Jones.

He will be back in the Indiana fedora and carrying a bullwhip shortly when the third George Lucas-Steven Spielberg Indiana Jones saga goes into production.

But this time when he plays Indiana Jones, Ford knows that it's a role he can break away from anytime he likes.

Witness has proved that. And Peter Weir and Ford thinks that's just fine.

'I became a carpenter instead of taking roles I didn't like'



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